

Madam Chair, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee,
My name is Pamela Munro, from Salem, Connecticut.

I speak in support of **S. B. 960 An act concerning school entry age**

I have been a member of Salem Board of Education for seven years, and on LEARN Board of Directors. I am not here as their formal representative.

I am here as a certified Connecticut teacher, Nursery through grade 8, with 36 years experience in DRG I, where Connecticut finds great challenges for student achievement. I am also here as an experienced parent of a December child.

Connecticut students will find greater success if they are matched with the appropriate curricula, materials and lessons. You may hear inspiring stories of children who met success despite being younger than five in kindergarten. You may hear that some children are 'ready' to begin formal public schooling at four. Your decision is for all Connecticut public school students, those coming to our kindergartens, as well as those students who continue through our higher grades.

Our Connecticut Frameworks organizes the curriculum for Connecticut kindergartners. Materials and many lessons that we adopt in our state are those published for use across the country. They constructed for use by five year olds turning six. Math lessons making charts in kindergarten recommend charting tooth loss month by month, number of jumps in jump roping. These are not an appropriate focus for four year olds. Connecticut teachers often adjust materials and lessons. The maturity mismatch also impacts further grade levels in similar ways.

Does the child who enters kindergarten at four find any better match entering grade one at five, or high school at thirteen? This is not a single year issue. The mismatch continues unless it is exchanged for a failure and repeating a grade or elimination as a drop out.

When parents consider sending a bright four year old to kindergarten, they probably do not picture a future with difficulties such as solving certain types of math problems because the brain has not physically matured to share information between lobes or later that their 14 year-old's friends are turning 16 and mainly focused on getting driving permits and solo dating.

In recent years nearly all states have lined up to bring students to kindergarten at age five. Connecticut students are compared with those of other states across the country who are likely to be older.

A few years ago my school had 39% of our kindergartners with fall birthdays. Their high profile presence changes the way some ideas must be delivered, and what can be done in some curriculum areas. There are differences in physical, emotional, behavioral and social abilities among 4, 5 and 6 year olds.

Some of you may be familiar with the series of books by Dr. Louise Bates Ames Dr. Frances Ilg from the Gesell Institute in our own Yale Child Study Center, a department of Yale School of Medicine. "Is your six year old ready for first grade?" is a huge topic of discussion for parents presented in *Your Six Year Old*. Unfortunately we are asking about five year olds here.

Some years ago I contacted principals and kindergarten teachers in about 15 towns including Farmington, Greenwich, Kent, Bethany, Bolton. No they do not see four year olds in kindergarten. They are held out for another year. There are few if any four year olds in kindergartens in higher income reference groups. They generally stay in preschool another year and get "more ready to be successful".

This bill would have most impact on students coming to kindergarten classrooms in low income groups. Some may say that low income students will be harmed by this change. Most low income students are paid for by Head Start funding. Such funding eligibility is tied to the entry age for public school in the community. This creates two problems under the current Connecticut statute:

1. Students who present the need to remain in a pre-school program and are four years old must go to kindergarten if they are legally age eligible for kindergarten.
 2. Two year olds can take spots in Head Start if three by January 1 because they are age eligible.
- So changing the entry age will allow four year olds to remain in Head Start, and also allow the spots to be used by three and four year olds getting ready for kindergarten entry.

Legislation is for all of Connecticut's public school population. We must strive for success for all. This will increase by matching curriculum, materials and lessons with the age appropriate Connecticut students.

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Points: Moving to Success for All

Match students' physical and mental maturity with appropriate curricula and materials/lessons
Sync Connecticut students with the rest of states (we are compared with them)
Most low income students are bound by Head Start rules linked to entry age
Affluent students with fall birthdays are coming at a later age widening the achievement gap
Students who are not in sync with classmates or lesson are most likely to repeat or drop out

From Head Start legislation:

§ 1305.4 Age of children and family income eligibility.

(a) To be eligible for Head Start services, a child must be at least three years old by the date used to determine eligibility for public school in the community in which the Head Start program is located, except in cases where the Head Start program's approved grant provides specific authority to serve younger children. Examples of such exceptions are programs serving children of migrant families and Early Head Start programs.

http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/cfr_2008/octqtr/pdf/45cfr1305.4.pdf

Louise Bates Ames, Ph. D. and Frances L. Iig, M.D. Your Six year old Loving and Defiant.

New York: Dell Press, 1981.